



**Briefing Statement
“The Global Water Crisis”**

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Chairman Hyde, Ranking Member Mr. Lantos, distinguished members of the House Committee on International Relations, I would like to thank you for your invitation to speak on the important issues that the “Water for the Poor Act of 2005” addresses, and welcome this opportunity to brief you on the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to increase access to safe water and sanitation in developing countries.

For over 40 years, UNDP has been working to support the poor, across the globe, to gain access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation, as part of the organisation’s broad development agenda.

First and foremost, our experience shows that improved access to water services and improved sanitation, coupled with sound management of water resources, contributes to improved livelihoods and productivity, improved human health, higher economic growth and gender equality. Investments in water and sanitation are strong development drivers. There is no development possible without water, and there is no healthy ecosystem, that does not depend on water for its survival.

These investments generate broad economic benefits that considerably outweigh the costs; they are critical for growth in all sectors and help eradicate poverty. The implications of investments in water and sanitation on GDP growth are astounding. Analyses indicate that a 0.3% increase in investments in household access to safe water is associated with a 1% increase in GDP. Furthermore, poor countries such as Kenya, Cambodia or Uganda with improved access to clean water and sanitation services have shown an annual average growth of 3.7%, whereas countries with the same per capita income but without improved access had an average annual per capita GDP growth of only 0.1%¹.

¹ Driving Development by Investing in Water and Sanitation: Five Facts Support the Argument (SIWI, 2005)

We are convinced that water is not only vital for life, and essential for development, but also a priority for contributing to the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – eight goals that represent a commitment by Governments at the 2000 UN Millennium Summit to make rapid progress on development issues by 2015. Not only is there an MDG target of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people without safe drinking water and basic sanitation, but water and sanitation services are essential to all the MDGs. We ask ourselves, can poverty and hunger be eradicated (MDG1), or maternal health improved (MDG 5), or child mortality reduced (MDG 4), or gender inequalities addressed (MDG3) without improved access to water and sanitation? The answer is ‘No’! These goals cannot be met without water and sanitation; and this is one of the strongest and most important reasons why – in my view – the “Water for the Poor Act of 2005” is so important.

The table at the end of this brief provides an illustration of the critical links between water and all the other MDGs. It also includes an illustration of the link between access to water and sanitation and gender equality and the empowerment of women. Our programmes in India, Sri Lanka, Lebanon and Yemen have illustrated that participatory approaches that provide equal opportunities for women and men to access water resources leads to greater equality, effectiveness, and sustainability. In Yemen, for instance, with support from UNDP, women’s groups, represented by the Supreme Council for Women, worked with the Ministry of Planning and in close coordination with other international cooperation agencies to bring gender perspectives into the country’s MDG-based Poverty Reduction Strategy.

However, Mr. Chairman, our experience also shows that local capacity constraints often pose a severe limitation to the achievement of the MDGs. This is where the focus of UNDP’s Water Programme lies. Through our ‘Effective Water Governance’ programme we aim to address some of the capacity constraints that exist in developing countries to improve access to water and sanitation services. Effective water governance provides an enabling environment – through policy, legal and institutional frameworks - for sustainable, equitable and economically efficient use and development of water resources. We have to make sure there is water running through the pipes that we build.

Our Water Governance Programme, through Cap-Net (a network of capacity building institutions), builds local capacities and ownership through education and training and empowers stakeholders and communities with the knowledge and ability to make decisions that directly affect their lives. UNDP supports the development of “good practice” mechanisms to promote integrated management of water resources. Our experience also shows that political will and commitment -- motivated with enough awareness and backed with sufficient capacity -- are key elements that determine the capabilities of governments to formulate integrated water resources management plans (per Johannesburg Plan of Implementation Targets) and to further implement them. With support from UNDP, several Arab countries including Egypt and Lebanon have approved their national water policies and Integrated Water Resource Management plans.

With support from the U.S. State Department, our Water Governance Programme also promotes increased cooperation between countries that share water resources (in the Nile, Mekong, Niger, and other strategic river basins). The U.S. State Department support to UNDP’s Transboundary Rivers Program is a critical element to promote peace and

stability in many regions. Water is a source of tension between countries; but it can also be an entry point for collaboration.

Through our network of over 130 country offices, UNDP works in partnership with national and local public sector institutions, civil society organizations, bilateral and multi-lateral organizations, the private sector and other UN partner agencies. The potential for coordination and complementarities is enormous.

At the national level, as part of UN-Water (an interagency coordination mechanism), UNDP supports the United Nations Development Group, Resident Coordinators, and the UN country teams by encouraging and facilitating participatory system-wide exchanges of information and dialogue on policy and operational issues. UN-Water will contribute to increased country-level coherence and aid harmonization through improved communication, information exchange and collaboration.

At the local level, UNDP works in partnership with central and local government and civil society organizations to strengthen decentralized and community-based water resources management and water supply and sanitation. Through community-centered programmes, such as the Community Water Initiative, active in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Mauritania, Sri Lanka and Guatemala, UNDP supports community mobilization and capacity building that empowers communities and local authorities to manage water resources and provide water supply and sanitation services that are affordable to the poor.

Finally, as world leaders prepare for 2005 World Summit in September, it is clear that in terms of the progress needed to achieve the Goals in the next ten years this is a defining moment for the world to make the course changes necessary to eradicate extreme poverty. It is, therefore, not only a review, but also a unique opportunity to inject new vigour and a renewed commitment to meet the goals by the 2015 deadline.

Mr. Chairman, the legislation you are considering draws much needed attention to safe water and sanitation and the suffering that is experienced around the world, particularly by the poor, who often have no access to these vital services. We at UNDP welcome this renewed interest and focus in Washington on what needs to be done, not only to reduce by 50% the total number of families without access to water and sanitation, but also to ensure that such programs are developed in a sustainable manner and led by effective management well attuned to the needs of local communities. UNDP welcomes the continued interest and leadership of the United States on this vital issue.

Thank you for permitting me to brief the Committee and I look forward to your questions.

LINKS BETWEEN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS) AND WATER ¹

MDG	Examples of links to water resources
1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihood strategies and food security of the poor depend directly on water quantity and quality (for agriculture, fisheries, drinking, etc.) and sanitation services. • The poor often have insecure rights to water resources and inadequate access to information, markets and decision-making – limiting their capability to protect or access water resources and improve their livelihoods and well-being.
2. Achieve universal primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time spent collecting water can reduce time available for schooling. • Lack of water and sanitation services in rural areas deters qualified teachers from teaching in poor villages.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and girls are especially burdened by water collection, which reduces their time and opportunity for education, literacy, and income-generating activities. • Women often have unequal rights and insecure access to water and other natural resources, limiting their opportunities and ability to access other productive assets.
4. Reduce child mortality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water and sanitation-related diseases (such as diarrhea) is a leading causes of under-five child mortality. • Lack of clean water and adequate fuels for boiling water directly contribute to preventable waterborne diseases.
5. Improve maternal health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of basic sanitation and safe water supply limit the quality of health services delivered, especially in rural areas.
6. Combat major diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to one-fifth of the total burden of disease in developing countries may be associated with water and other environmental risk factors (e.g. malaria, water-borne diseases, parasitic infections). Preventive measures to reduce environmental health hazards are as important and often more cost-effective than treatment.
8. Global partnership for development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The burden of external debt, unfair terms of trade for primary products, and aggressive investment in natural resources sectors can greatly increase the pressure to overexploit water and other natural resources in developing countries.

¹ Based on DFID, EC, UNDP, World Bank (2002) Linking Poverty Reduction and Environmental Management. Policy Challenges and Opportunities. Department for International Development, UK (DFID); Directorate General for Development, European Commission (EC); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); World Bank, Washington; and United Development Programme (2002) *Poverty Environment Initiative*, New York.